Depot Town Rag

Volume 13, Number 7 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

100% FREE Rag content

July 1990

It's summer in old Depot Town

For the birds

Jazz tradition goes on

Dateline: Depot Town

. . . and other strictly local stuff

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

Depot people: Brothers reunited in the old neighborhood

City Body's Scott and Bruce Sobbry mark the third generation in their family's auto repair business which began with grandpa Sobbry's shop in Elk Rapids, Michigan. Dad brought the business to its Stony Creek location near Milan in 1959. Gary, Bruce and Scott grew up in Depot Town, however - in the big yellow Greek Revival on the corner of Cross and Huron. The younger brothers went to work with dad and Gary stayed in the area, opening his towing service on Lincoln Street in 1973.

Two years ago the pair purchased the ancient City Body Shop in Depot Town and began to restore the Italianate style building to a condition it had not enjoyed for many years. Ironically, City Body's reputation reached all the way back to the 1930's, too, so it seemed a logical new venture. The rear, as well as the west garage were totally restored by the ever-active Sobbrys. The office was modernized to a believable 1890's patina and most of the district figured that was 'it' for preservation and expansion in the auto body business.

But Scott and Bruce kept going and this summer saw the completion of a 9100 square foot addition to the rear of the facility. At the end of June the entire shop opened to continued business and Bruce will now close the Milan operation he has been managing.

But there's still more to come: Not content with everything 'just good enough,' the Sobbry boys will now develop the unused second floor of the original building for company offices and an employee lounge. Welcome back to the old neighborhood, boys.

DDA on track again

After two months of inactivity since City Council's refusal to unify the Depot Town Downtown Development Authority District, DDA members and City officials have reactivated their process. Councilmember V. Lois Wells attended the June meeting and Councilmember Danny Hoffman has pledged his support. The meetings continue on the 2nd Thursday of each month in the Freighthouse Coffeeshop at 7:30. New appointments may be made by Mayor King after July. Let your interest be known to Paul Fetters at River Artworks.

More signs of life in Depot Town

It took more than eight years to get 'the govmint' to put up signs around town telling the rest of the world how to find this little district, but that success has opened the flood gates to signs for the district. Now an out-of-towner can cruise in off the Interstate and find Ypsilanti's historic Depot Town simply by following the signs which won't let them confuse us with downtown or EMU. But, with the plethora of signage which followed those directions, can they see us when they get here?

The railroad felt the crossing gates were sufficient for many years, but only in 1989 did they feel it was necessary to add the yellow and black **RR Crossing** disk on our four-way approach to trackside.

That same intersection boasts the City's most ignored **traffic light**, too. There's a pre-warning light on north-bound River Street that stops cars at the tracks — a full fifty feet away from the street crossing — but seldom does anyone stop back that far.

The usual **Handicapper/wheelchair emblems** reserve spaces for those who have less ease in getting around, and handicap access has been improving at a rapid rate in the district.

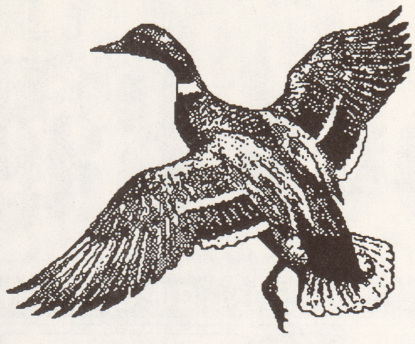
And it doesn't take a police patrol to enforce this necessity. Just about everyone in the block will scold an unqualified driver for hogging these prime properties.

One sign the district does *not* have is the ubiquitous 'No U-turn' emblem. This is one of the few commercial districts where U-turns *are* permitted — simply because the streets at the depot were originally designed so that wagons could turn around with their entire team of horses attached. The tradition continues, with its practitioners showing great care and caution in the process.

Caution is the key word when driving in Depot Town. There are **pedestrians** everywhere: on the sidewalks, in the streets, looking in shop windows, sitting around the flower beds. Now, rather than erecting more signs which might block the view of such delightful street activity, neighbors are encouraged to pay close attention to the activity. Keep on waving, hollering and even tooting to each other. It's a glorious sign of continued life in the old district.

Is Depot Town 'for the birds?' (and skunks, opossums and woodchucks?)

There's plenty of wild life left in this inner city neighborhood



[Several years ago *The Rag* published a piece about small wild life in the district. Just about the only survivors of that period are the pair of pink plastic flamingoes overlooking the Market Plaza from Professor Malarkey's Follett House balcony. They're doing well, and so is the rest of the block. Here's a 1990 update.]

Depot Towners agree that most of the 'wild life' has left the sanitized sidewalks of the district and retreated to the wooded shores of the Huron River in the last decade. All you need to take this census is an early morning walk or a quiet evening's stroll along the Cross Street Bridge and around the perimeter of Frog Island and you'll see what locals refer to as the 'other population' of this tiny urban enclave.

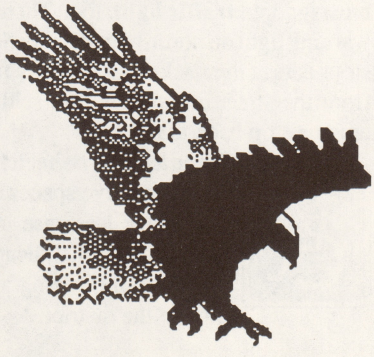
The **woodchuck** family boasts three pups who are getting brave enough to come out of their burrow to confront neighborhood dogs on their daily runs. **Opossums** don't need to confront hostile headlights when they can waddle across a parking lot and avoid the street traffic. Shy **skunks** let loose their spray only in defense from other animals; the people seem to leave them alone. Only the **rabbits** have lost their population status — due to the several **feral cats** which clean out the birth nests with great regularity.

Squirrels are the newest members of the ground society, moving east from their wooded west-side back yards to the dumpsters along the backs and sides of the railroad district eateries and apartments.

The deer herd keeps making its presence known as close as downtown Ann Arbor and even on the patios (and in the living rooms) of Ford Lake condos, but they started avoiding Depot Town way back when the railroad went through.

And, if these are the ground troops of the block, there is an active air force as well and it, too, includes old hands and new recruits: Some of the usual bird-feeder denizens include **robins, blue jays,** and **cardinals**; they abound in just about every neighborhood. But the musical sounds of wild **canaries, orioles, purple finches, warblers** and **cat birds** fill the air when the passing trains don't drown them out. Watch for the **Baltimore Orioles'** hanging nests in the giant poplars around the Frog Island amphitheater.

Some of the most intelligent birds are the resident **crows** and **seagulls** which have taken over the local airways. District bird-watchers characterize these two as the "most adaptable, intelligent and opportunistic" of the predator birds in Our Town. Gulls were virtually unknown this far inland until the giant landfill projects began surrounding the urban area. Now the pickings are better at Wayne Disposal than on the shores of Lake Erie. And they're not above cruising the small cities for leftovers, either.



Water birds include our year-'round **Mallards,** migrating **swans**, and a resident **King Fisher** who patrols the waters around Riverside Park.

Their counterparts in district clean-up are the several varieties of **hawk: Red Tail, Sharp Shin** and others, who make aerial attacks upon the **pigeons** which breed and nest in the former Farm Bureau building on Forest Avenue. They swirl overhead, attack and devour, leaving only a few grey-feathered wing bones on the ground at the end of their spectacular meal/event. Some say that pigeons are merely "airborne rats," but the hawks seem to enjoy them.

Seldom seen but often heard are the local **owls**, but they do their job to keep the population balanced. Although they're shy and quiet, they see the human population much more than the human population sees them. The few humans who know where they are aren't telling, and we value their privacy, too. Together we make it a real neighborhood.

"They keep the paths a sacred groove along which all their lives they move, but how the wise old wood gods laugh as they follow the migrations of that calf . . . " (From *The Calf Path*). That same old issue of *The Rag* carried a cartoon by Shoe, showing the birds exclaiming over the preservation of the historic district. (Remember *that* election?)

"They want the downtown to be like it was orginally," said the secretary bird.

"And what was it originally?" asked the owl editor, stooped over his ancient typewriter.

"Trees, mostly," was the reply.

So it goes with Depot Town. Some of our residents hardly noticed the intrusion of brick buildings that moved onto the riverside paths one hundred and forty-some years ago.

Depot Town's citizens continue to coexist in such a well-balanced continuity that the old wood gods must chuckle over our steady regularity and habitual ways of being neighbors.

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Support theDepot Town Association:

√ **Voting membership** (property/business owners) = $25

√ **Associate membership** (monthly mailings) = $10

√ **Patron membership** = $100 for life.

c/o *The Old Caboose, Down in Depot Town!*

Dateline: Depot Town

Big Bob to move - If you've been in the custom of picking up your monthly *Depot Town Rag* at Big Bob's Magazine Emporium these last six years, you'll have to shop around beginning in August. Big Bob (aka Tony Brown) will close his local shop to become a full-time comic book distributor.

Moving upstairs - J.R. Trading Post owner and operator, Jerry Tillman, has followed an old neighborhood tradition by moving to the apartment over the store. Well, actually, it's not directly above the shop — but over one space. Both Jerry's apartment and her store are, however, in the historic Follett House. Now, please, don't go knocking on her door after hours. Wait until opening time to get that Frog-straw summer hat.

Publication a success - Thanks to local sponsors who made the Frog Island Festival printed program a success. And thanks to Standard Printing for the usual high quality.

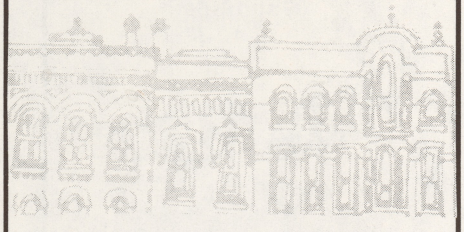
Storage room for rent - 14' X 18', private entrance; inquire at Teachers Shop, 15 E. Cross or call 482-6373.

Red Rooster sold: Rick Abdullah has sold his successful pizza and ice cream business and, even though the new owner is Malaysian, that doesn't mean we'll have his delightful national menu on the block. The Rooster will still serve the same excellent pizza and ice cream. Good luck to Rick, Brenda and the kids as they return to the family business in Dearborn.

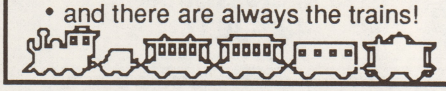
Arts tradition continues - Ruthie Farjada and John Underhill have moved into their newly purchased 'Artrain' building, so dubbed by the former owners, Beverly and Don Shankwiler, who led the way in owner-occupied properties on the block in the late seventies. Both Ruthie and John are practicing artists and have long-range plans for a gallery.

Façade facelift - It was the most subtle treatment in a decade, but when Aubree's Saloon opened their second floor pool parlor (STICKS), they replaced the first floor awnings, added new second floor awnings and installed wall-washing flood lights at the top of the first floor cornice. It's a gorgeous evening entry from River Street.

Down in Depot Town



It's a Summer Festival!
• Frog Island Festival
• Summer sales
• Sidewalk dining
• Heritage Jazz Competition
• Heritage Festival
• Antiques • Food • Fun
• and there are always the trains!



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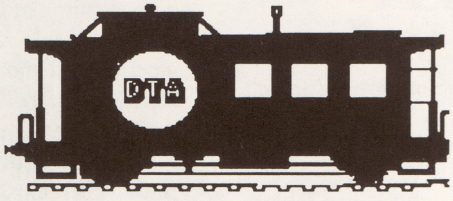
SPECIAL AUGUST ISSUE of The Depot Town Rag will feature out-of district advertising. Rates on request:
c/o TheCaboose, 400 Market Pl., Ypsi, MI 48198

The Depot Town Association, Inc. June 21, 1990

Minutes of May were approved as read.

Treasurer: Recent income came from Frog Island flyer and program. Printing and Edison bills are missing.

Budget & Events: Frog Island is ready to go w/ 10% of net profit due from The Ark. Shall we produce a similar program for Heritage Competition? Dodd will edit, McKeever will solicit ads, Hansens will print.



Heritage Festival: $16,400 in expenses is anticipated for Heritage Competition. Regular Boys, Robert Penn and Henry Ford Community College Band booked for headliner performances. Audition tapes are at WEMU. Volunteer workers are needed for set-up, security, clean-up. The bar will be managed in the same fashion as the April Blues Fest. Liquor liability insurance is nearly set. Antique bottles, angle-parked antique autos and other collectibles will be featured in the street and plaza. An antique brass bed will be raffled off. Jazz T-shirts will be exhibited at Jazz Tent and sold in local businesses.

Neighborhood promotions: Approved $81 for signs for Frog Island Festival. Redder paint is needed on the 'Welcome' sign's caboose.

Name ownership: Michigan Department of Commerce says Festival names cannot be co-owned due to WEMU's lack of corporate status. Notify Art Timko to figure what he wants to do.

***Rag* Report:** Green promotion for Frog Island was successful. No July edition unless bills are paid. *The Rag* will publish an expanded edition for August in lieu of printed program. Unpaid sponsors will be dropped as of August. Outside ads will be solicited for the August special. Fetters will take archive *Rags* to EMU library.

Membership/Volunteers: Judi Monaghan will take these duties until September annual meeting and election of officers. We need to monitor memberships more closely.

Tree support: DTA will split cost of planting and transplanting five trees with City at $230.00 upon receipt of bill from City. Much discussion and agreement.

Testimonials: Thanks and hopes all around for hard work and steady volunteerism. DTA supports *The Rag*.

Erratta: *Rag* is often confused with Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti dailies.

CBC task force will examine relations between neighborhood organizations and Chamber, etc. What are the possibilities of DTA becoming an arm of the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce? Many are individual members, but what about a group membership? Pros and cons will be examined.

N.I.F.T.Y.: No report

Downtown Development Authority: Michigan Assistant Attorney General is investigating unification of District and Tax Increment Financing possibilities for Depot Town. Resignations and end-of-terms are imminent. New appointments are due in July.

Nominating committee: Jerry Tillman will solicit names for the four offices to be voted upon at September's DTA annual meeting.

Best Yet Award: to the 18 involved, interested and intense neighbors who showed for the June DTA meeting.

Golden Goose Award: to the vandals who broke shop windows uptown and in Depot Town one night in June.

DTA memberships:

√ **Regular member**
(for business and property owners = $25 annually.

√ **Associate member**
(non-voting, serve on committees, monthly Rag mailed to home address) = $10 annually.

√ **Patron member**
(Rag mailed home forever) = $100

July 1990

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

Development Authority (DDA)
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 7/12
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

Association
7:30 p.m. Thursday, 7/19
The Old Caboose

Antique Engine Club
7:00 p.m. Thursday, 7/26
Freighthouse Coffeeshop

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate.

-Tom Dodd, editor

Depot Town Association, Inc.
Paul Fetters, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

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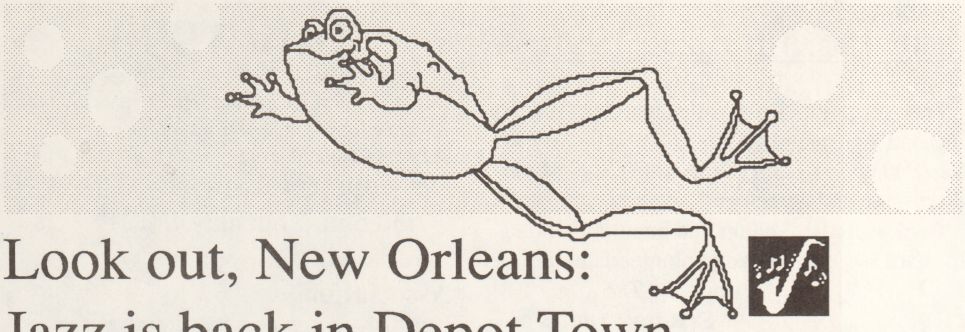

Look out, New Orleans: Jazz is back in Depot Town

April's Blues Fest in the Freighthouse was the turn-around for musical promotion in the district. Hundreds came out for a show of musical talent not even seen in the giant arenas being popularized around the state. Some said that New Orleans' Preservation Hall could learn a lesson from this unique event.

Then came the enormous success of the **Frog Island Festival**: after eight years of growth, the music expanded to three days of the best music from Detroit, Chicago and New Orleans. Rain and cold notwithstanding, the loyal crowds were ecstatic and the neighborhood was again 'discovered' by many newcomers to Ypsilanti's Historic District. District promotion was excellent.

August will see the return of the **Heritage Jazz Competition** which was eliminated from last year's Heritage Festival. Local organizers are busy culling the names of loyal volunteers from a two-year-old phone list. (If you haven't made your interest known yet, leave a note at The Old Caboose or call the editor [482-6371] to help with the bar, the gate, set-up or clean-up for one of the district's premiere cultural events.)

With all this enthusiasm for musical fun in the block, will the **Winter Jazz Series** be coming back? Recent profits and good press may make the difference, but raw enthusiasm displayed at the 3rd Thursday Association meetings in the Caboose will make the most difference of all. Join the fun and help the neighborhood decide about next year's program for the good of the district.

Frog Island electrified once more

Yet another benefit to the neighborhood from the jazz tradition has been the appearance of an electrical box on the west rim of the district's back yard, Frog Island. Sandwiched in between June soccer games, a trench was made from the east-side block house power supply and a new electrical box/outlet was installed near what used to be Ypsilanti High School's home team bleachers.

Special thanks are due to Al Shelton's usual enthusiasm and positive contribution to the quality of life in Ypsilanti . . . and to helpers from The Ark and DTA. The Visitors and Convention Bureau and Heritage Festival Committee footed the bill for the electrical equipment.

Soccer, running, dog-walking and concerts continue in that historic space. What would Mark Norris think of the site he chose for his lumber mill back in the early 1800's? He was one of the City's earliest boosters; he should think this most recent development is most appropriate!

Windows broken -- wrong-doers caught & charged; confess

June's 'Best Yet Award' could go to the YPD and Officer Pierce for bringing the June 20 window-breaking spree to a quick resolution. Front panes were smashed at the Old Town Resaurant, Hon's Flowers, Depot Exchange and several downtown businesses in the wee hours of the morning before.

Witness from Aubree's front window aided in the arrest and identification of two men who were quickly arrested and charged with malicious destruction of property. A clear footprint from the center of Hon's window was the best evidence. It matched the suspect's shoe perfectly.

The damage was estimated at over $3500 and civil suits are expected to follow to pay for replacement of the glass.

[Wanda Spieser introduces her 'color column' in this month's *Rag*. Watch for her. - ed]

Some kinda' wonderful!

The town known as "Depot" had itself a real WOW time on the week-end of Friday, June 22nd. It was Ypsi-mania, rain or shine, at the Frog Island Festival. The weather did show its teeth in spells, but the fun never got wet. At the intersection of River and Cross Streets there was a blending of Big-tent sounds and smells as some kinda' wonderful music turned sad into glad and the meek children and meek elderly felt a thrill as a poignant train whistle sounded somewhere behind the pageantry. Smells protruding from the refreshment stands were impossible to ignore, so there was much pizza-ing, kielbasa-ing and every-thing which was *bon apetit* in the warm summer weather.

There was revelry and there was something serious going on too. Next door to the Ypsi Food Co-op on River St. it was Open House time at the new Depot Town Sourdough Bakery. Actually, it was 'sourdough" time as the manager, Tom Kenny, and his doughboys pounded out loaves of sourdough rye and wheat bread. In the soon-to-be lively future of this venture will be many loaves of sourdough bread being turned out on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays between nine and five o'clock and, down the road, there will be sourdough cinnamon and sesame. For the folks who are gung-ho about their health and longevity, the original sourdough is made of only flour, water, and salt, but all of these goodies will taste like "right out of Mother Nature's" brick oven. Stop by and look it over.

As you hokey-pokey all over the town known as Depot, we wish you a long and happy life — filled with train whistles, rainbow-type festivals — and the pungent smell of good bread baking! - Wanda Spieser

Please join us for the first annual

Festival of Lights Summer Stroll

Thursday, 12 July, Riverside Park

- Community Band concert - 7:30 pm
- Festival lights go on at dusk

(and stay on until 10:30 or 11 pm)

The operations crew will be working in the park all evening, so you can take a close look at how the Festival takes shape. Volunteers will also be on hand to answer your questions, encourage your participation, and gratefully accept financial contributions.

New Festival of Lights sweatshirts will be on sale during the Summer Stoll.

Special 10%-off coupons from downtown and Depot Town restaurants are available for before-and-after dining that night.

Sponsored by the Ypsilanti Visitors & Convention Bureau and the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce

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